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AUTHOR Quiroz, Julia Teresa
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions of 22 national Hispanic American leaders about poverty among Hispanics. Eleven of the leaders were Mexican American; five were Puerto Rican; four were Cuban American; one was Central American; and one was South American. Twelve of the leaders were heads of public interest organizations; six were members of Congress; two headed unions; and two were volunteer directors of national Hispanic organizations. Six of the leaders were women; 17 were men. The following summary findings are reported: (1) most believed that Hispanic poverty is growing; (2) about half believed that the nature of Hispanic poverty had changed over time; (3) about half did not consider "persistent poverty" or the "underclass" to require special attention; (4) a wide range of causes for poverty among Hispanics were identified; (5) half did not consider Hispanic poverty to be different from poverty among other groups; (6) civil rights and education were the two areas in which the leaders have seen the most improvement for low-income Hispanics; (7) half felt that education is the top public policy priority; and (8) education, social programs, political and self-help organizing, and more equitable taxation were cited as promising strategies to improve poverty conditions. The following conclusions are reported: (1) the issues of importance to these leaders sometimes parallel other national issues, but often with different emphases; (2) these leaders blend a range of strategies in their approach to poverty; (3) many of these leaders identified special challenges facing Hispanic women; and (4) Hispanic institutions can serve an important role in improving the lives of low-income Hispanics. Statistical data are presented in nine graphs and seven tables. The interview questionnaire and an 11-item bibliography are appended. (FMW)

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TWENTY-TWO HISPANIC LEADERS DISCUSS POVERTY

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The National Council of La Raza

The National Council of La Raza, one of the largest national Hispanic organizations in the country, exists to improve life opportunities for the more than 20 million Americans of Hispanic descent. NCLR serves as an umbrella organization for more than 120 affiliated Hispanic community-based organizations in 32 states and the District of Columbia. In addition to its Washington, D.C. headquarters, NCLR maintains field offices in Los Angeles, California; Phoenix, Arizona; and, McAllen, Texas. NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis and advocacy on behalf of all Hispanic Americans; provides technical assistance and capacity-building support to Hispanic community-based organizations; undertakes public information activities to inform Hispanic communities and the American public about Hispanic status, needs, and concerns; and develops special catalytic projects.

The Poverty Project

The Poverty Project serves as NCLR's base for information and advocacy regarding Hispanic poverty in the United States. The Project is supported primarily by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

The Poverty Project:

- Promotes effective public policies. The Poverty Project develops reports which analyze, identify, and promote public policies to reduce poverty;

- Provides issue forums. The Poverty Project stimulates ideas and interaction by sponsoring discussion roundtables, workshops, and fellowships, and through participation in academic conferences;

- Cultivates public support and understanding. The Poverty Project disseminates information to Congress through briefings and testimony; to the media through press conferences and interviews; to local and national organizations through presentations and a quarterly newsletter; and to the general public through articles and editorials.

TWENTY-TWO HISPANIC LEADERS DISCUSS POVERTY

Results from the Hispanic Leaders Study

Final Version
November 1990

Prepared By:

Julia Teresa Quiroz
Senior Policy Analyst

Policy Analysis Center
Office of Research, Advocacy, and Legislation
National Council of La Raza

Raul Yzaguirre,
President

810 First Street, NE
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 289-1380

Executive Summary

In 1989, more than a quarter of all Hispanics lived in poverty (26.7%), including 37.6% of Hispanic children, 16.2% of Hispanic married-couple families, and 16.4% of Hispanic families with a working head of household. Poverty has been a factor in virtually every Hispanic issue, from education to community development, from housing to civil rights. However, there is little documentation of the ways Hispanics have worked to end poverty, and few examinations of the institutions, strategies, and leadership which could produce a Hispanic anti-poverty agenda. The Hispanic Leaders Study was developed to provide some of this documentation.

Twenty-two national Hispanic leaders participated in the Hispanic Leaders Study. Each provided information on his or her personal background; each participated in an in-depth interview. The following report describes the way the study was developed and conducted, summarizes the themes which emerged, highlights excerpts from the interviews, and concludes with an interpretation of the study's implications.

Of the leaders that participated in this study:

- Eleven were Mexican American; five were Puerto Rican; four were Cuban American; one was Central American; and one was South American;
- Twelve were heads of public interest organizations; one headed a trade association; six were members of Congress; and one headed a labor union. Two were volunteer directors of national Hispanic organizations: of these, one worked in government and the other in the private sector;
- Six were women; 17 were men.

This study found that:

- Most of the leaders interviewed believed poverty among Hispanics is growing;
- About half believed the nature of Hispanic poverty has changed over time;
- About half did not consider "persistent poverty" or the "underclass" to require special attention;
- These leaders identified a wide range of causes for poverty among Hispanics, including: lack of opportunities, especially educational opportunities; racism and discrimination; unemployment and macroeconomic trends; and the special challenges facing Hispanic women, such as sexism and single parenthood;
- Half did not consider Hispanic poverty to be distinct from poverty among other populations;
- Civil rights and education were the two areas in which these leaders have seen the most improvements for low-income Hispanics; many also emphasized the role of Hispanic institutions in those efforts;

- Half felt that education is the top public policy priority;

- These leaders found various strategies promising, including education, social programs, political and self-help organizing, and more equitable taxation.

This report includes the following conclusions based on the study's findings:

- The issues of importance to these leaders sometimes parallel other national issues, but often with a different emphasis;

- These leaders blend a range of strategies in their approach to poverty;

- Many of these leaders identified special challenges facing Hispanic women;

- Hispanic institutions have served an important role in improving the lives of low-income Hispanics.

This report both raises and answers questions. Most importantly, however, this report may help both Hispanic and non-Hispanics recognize one important resource for ending Hispanic poverty: the leadership of the Hispanic community itself.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction 1

II. Methodology 3

Selection of Leaders 3

Research Questions 3

The Interviews 3

Who Participated in This Study? 4

III. Hispanic Leaders Profile 5

Ethnicity 5

Occupation 5

Nativity 5

Occupational Background and Parents' Occupational Background 6

Educational Attainment 6

Sex. 6

IV. Interviews: Poverty Among Hispanics 7

Has Poverty Among Hispanics Grown, Diminished, or Stayed at the Same Level? 7

Has the Nature of Poverty Among Hispanics Changed? 8

Is Persistent Poverty a Significant Issue for Hispanics? 9

What Are the Primary Causes of Poverty Among Hispanics? 10

Is Hispanic Poverty Unique? 11

V. Interviews: Poverty and Public Policies 12

What Past Strategies Do You Consider Significant? 12

What Is the Highest Public Policy Priority For Ending Poverty Among Hispanics? 14

What Current Action Do You Consider Promising? 15

VI. Conclusions 17

Appendix A: Detailed Responses 18

Appendix B: Interview Guide 25

Appendix C: For Further Reading 27

I. Introduction

This report has one primary goal: to provide a preliminary context for the development of Hispanic-focused anti-poverty strategies.

To address this goal, this report has been organized into three central sections:

- "Hispanic Leaders Profile," which describes the ethnicity, occupation, nativity, occupational background, parents' occupational background, education attainment, and gender of these leaders;

- "Interviews: Poverty Among Hispanics," which summarizes and highlights responses to five questions regarding the nature, prevalence, and causes of poverty among Hispanics;

- "Interviews: Poverty and Public Policy," which includes summaries of and excerpts from responses to three questions regarding past and present anti-poverty strategies and current public policy priorities.

The final section of this report, "Conclusions," suggests the most significant implications of these findings.

II. Methodology

The Selection of Leaders

In May, 1989, 30 national Hispanic leaders were invited to participate in the Hispanic Leaders Study; 22 of these invited leaders subsequently participated in the study. For the purposes of this study, the definition of "leader" was limited to members of Congress or directors of national Hispanic public-interest organizations. Priority was also given to organizations with particularly large constituencies and those which have historically focused on issues affecting low-income Hispanics. The leaders in this study represent national Hispanic institutions which have been involved in the design, implementation, and administration of efforts to address Hispanic poverty. Of course, there are many other Hispanic leaders, such as those who represent religious, business, or academic affiliations, or the wide range of Hispanics who provide leadership at the state, local, and community level. This study examines just one part of the Hispanic community's broad range of leaders.

Research Questions

This study addressed three research questions:

(1) **What are the characteristics of the national Hispanic leaders interviewed?**

(2) **What have been their experiences with poverty and efforts to address it?**

(3) **What are these leaders' perspectives regarding: the nature, prevalence, and causes of poverty among Hispanics; the effectiveness of past and present poverty-focused strategies; and current public policy priorities.**

Each leader was asked to provide personal background information and to participate in an individual, in-depth interview specifically focused on the issue of poverty. (See Appendix B.) Information from the Background Questionnaire was designed to be quantified for the Leaders' Profile. However, the interview questions were designed only to serve as a general guide for the interviews.

The Interviews

Between May and October 1989, 22 of the invited leaders participated in the study. Each interview was conducted by NCLR Senior Policy Analyst Julie Quiroz. All the interviews were recorded and followed the Interview Question Guide. For a number of reasons, the interviews were not uniform. For example, the length of the interviews ranged from one-half hour to an hour and a half, depending on the leaders' schedules. Also, because the interviews were conducted over a period of six months, the issues current to each interview varied, sometimes influencing the focus of the interview. In sum, each interview was a unique conversation from which opinions, emotions, and attitudes emerged.

Who Participated In This Study?*

Congressman Albert G. Bustamante
Democrat, Texas

Congressman E. (Kika) de la Garza
Democrat, Texas

Jane Delgado – *President*
National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organizations
A national coalition of organizations and individuals concerned with improving health and social services for Hispanics. Established: 1974

Guarione Diaz – *Executive Director and President*
Cuban American National Council
A social service organization established to identify the economic social, and educational needs of Cuban-Americans and other Hispanics in the United States. Established: 1972

Mario Diaz – *National Chairman*
American GI Forum of the United States
A membership organization advocating on Hispanic issues for veterans and their families. Established: 1948

Ruben Franco – *President and General Counsel*
Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund
An organization which challenges discrimination in housing, education, employment, health, and political participation. Established: 1972

Congressman Robert Garcia
Democrat, New York

Albert Jacquez – *President*
Latin American Management Association
A national trade association organized to represent Hispanic manufacturing and high-technology firms throughout the United States. Established: 1973

Antonia Hernandez – *President and General Counsel*
Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
An organization focused on class action litigation, [illegible] education, and leadership training to [illegible] obstacles preventing Hispanics from [illegible] participating in American society. Established: [illegible]68

Jose Longoria – *Executive Director*
National Educational Service Centers
League of United Latin American Citizens
A Hispanic educational agency that helps disadvantaged youth stay in school and provides scholarships for college. Established: 1973

Irma Maldonado – *President*
Mexican American Women's National Association
A membership organization promoting leadership among Hispanic women. Established: 1974

Congressman Matthew G. Martinez
Democrat, California

Louis Nuñez – *President*
National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc.
An organization established to foster the social, economic, and political well-being of all Puerto Ricans. Established: 1977

Congressman Solomon P. Ortiz
Democrat, Texas

Jack F. Otero – *National President*
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
A national Hispanic trade union association. Established: 1973

Harry Pachon – *National Director*
National Association of Latino Elected Officials
Research and advocacy organization concerned with Hispanic issues such as children in poverty, federal employment of Hispanics, citizenship, and amnesty. Established: 1976

Ana Maria Perera – *Past President and Founder*
National Association of Cuban American Women
An organization providing direct services to Cuban American women and other Spanish-speaking people. Established: 1977

Janice Petrovich – *National Executive Director*
ASPIRA Association, Inc.
An organization dedicated to encouraging and promoting education and leadership development among Hispanic youth. Established: 1961

Silvia Rosales – *President*
Central American Refugee Center
Organization established for the protection of Central American refugees. Established: 1981

Congressman Esteban Torres
Democrat, California

Hector Velasquez – *President*
National Puerto Rican Forum
An organization which develops strategies, means, and methods to remove obstacles which block advancement of Hispanics; provides employment and training services. Established: 1977

Raul Yzaguirre – *President and CEO*
National Council of La Raza
A national umbrella organization for over 120 affiliated Hispanic community-based organizations; conducts research, policy analysis, advocacy, technical assistance, and public information activities. Established: 1968

* This information was gathered from the leaders and from *Directory of Hispanic Organizations, 1989-1991*, Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, Inc., 1990

III. Hispanic Leaders Profile

Compared to the overall Hispanic population, this group of leaders was representative in terms of ethnic composition, nativity, and parents' occupational background. However, as could be expected, a higher proportion of these leaders worked in professional occupations and had professional occupational backgrounds than the overall Hispanic population, and a much higher proportion had completed some level of higher education. Among the leaders studied, Hispanic women were underrepresented compared to their proportion of the overall Hispanic population.

Ethnicity

Leaders: Eleven (50%) of the Hispanic leaders interviewed were Mexican American. Five (23%) were Puerto Rican. One (5%) was Central American; one (5%) was South American; four (18%) were Cuban American.

Hispanic Population: In 1989, 62.6% of all Hispanics were Mexican American; 11.6% were Puerto Rican; 5.3% were Cuban American; 12.7% were Central or South American; and 7.8% were Other Hispanic.

Occupation

Leaders: Twelve (55%) of the Hispanic leaders interviewed were heads of public interest organizations, one (5%) headed a trade association, six (27%) were members of Congress, and one (5%) worked with a labor union. Two (9%) were volunteer directors of national organizations; of these, one worked in government and the other in the private sector.

Hispanic Population: In 1989, 12.1% of Hispanic men were employed in "managerial" or "professional specialty occupations." Among non-Hispanic men, this proportion was 26.4%. The proportion of Hispanic women employed in managerial or professional speciality positions in 1989 was 14.9%, compared to 26.3% among non-Hispanic women. In 1989, the largest proportion of Hispanic men (28.6%) was employed as "operators, fabricators, and laborers." The largest proportion of Hispanic women (38.4%) was employed in "technical, sales, and administrative support positions."

Nativity

Leaders: Fourteen (64%) of the Hispanic leaders interviewed were born in the United States: 10 in the mainland U.S. and three on the island of Puerto Rico. Six (27%) of the leaders were born outside the United States. For two leaders, nativity information was not available.

Hispanic Population: In 1980, the last year for which such information is available, about two-thirds of all Hispanics were born in the United States. Twenty-six percent of Mexican Americans, 77% of Cuban Americans, 80% of Central and South Americans, and 17% of Other Hispanics were foreign-born.

Leaders' Occupational Background and Parents' Occupational Background

Leaders: The Hispanic leaders in this study came from a wide range of backgrounds. Three began their careers in public policy, three in law, two in the field of health, two in social services, two in labor and labor unions, two in business, one in academia, one in teaching, one in journalism, and one in engineering. Occupational background information was not available from four of the leaders.

Parents: Among the mothers of these leaders, four worked in factories, two worked in service occupations, two held clerical jobs, three worked in business, three were teachers, one was a farmworker, and one was a lawyer. Information on mothers' occupational background was not available from 6 of the leaders.

Among the fathers of these leaders, four worked in service occupations, one worked as an office clerk, three worked in factories or manufacturing, one worked in business, three were farmworkers, one was an engineer, one was a lawyer, and one was a journalist. For seven of these leaders, this information was not available.

Educational Attainment

Leaders: Seventeen (77%) of these leaders completed college or graduate school. Two (9%) completed high school. For three, information on educational attainment was not available.

Hispanic Population: In 1989, 50.9% of Hispanics aged 25 years or older had completed four years of high school or more, compared to 78.8% of the non-Hispanic population. Nearly ten percent of Hispanics had completed four years of college or more, compared to 21.9% of the non-Hispanic population.

Sex

Leaders: Six (27%) of the Hispanic leaders interviewed were women; 17 (77%) were men.

Hispanic Population: In 1989, among Hispanics overall, women made up 49.8% of the population and men men made up 50.2%.

IV. Interviews:
Poverty Among Hispanics

1
Has Poverty Among Hispanics Grown, Diminished, or Stayed at the Same Level?

Summary

Most of the leaders interviewed believed poverty among Hispanics is growing. Eighteen of the 22 leaders believed Hispanic poverty is worsening. Of these 18, 10 were Mexican American, four were Puerto Rican, two were Central or South American, and two were Cuban American.

These 18 leaders offered a variety of reasons for this belief:

- **Nine were concerned with a growth in poverty among certain segments of the Hispanic population**, such as children, the elderly, recent immigrants, Puerto Ricans, and Hispanics living in *colonias* (unincorporated communities in the U.S.-Mexico border region).

- **Five saw Hispanic poverty as part of larger economic trends**, such as an overall growth in poverty in the U.S.; a growing disparity between the rich and poor; changes in the types of occupations available and the skills and credentials needed for them; and concentration in occupations in which wages have not kept pace with inflation.

- **Two pointed to federal policies**. One leader felt that growing Hispanic poverty reflects reduction in government spending programs. Another leader argued that the drop in the proportion of Hispanics attending college is an indication of worsening economic status and less student financial aid.

Excerpts:

When I was young, it took my family five years to get out of poverty, and my mother was working two and three jobs. One of the main reasons we escaped poverty was that I got a scholarship. Those kinds of scholarships have now practically dried up.

-- Albert Jacquez

Poverty is getting worse, in part because it's more concentrated. When I was in high school, 40% of the students were Puerto Rican and that was the highest for any public school. Now there are 100 public schools that are over 90% Puerto Rican. The concentration of need is also getting worse.

-- Louis Nuñez

Education continues to be one of the better exit points out of poverty. But federal financial aid programs and student assistance have been reduced and we're paying the price as a community.

-- Jose Longoria

2

Has the nature of poverty among Hispanics changed?

Summary

About half these leaders believed the nature of poverty has changed. Thirteen of the 22 leaders interviewed felt the nature of poverty among Hispanics has changed. Three did not believe the nature of poverty has changed. Six had no opinion.

Those who felt the nature of poverty has changed defined this change in different ways:

- **Self-perception.** Four leaders felt that Hispanics' perception of themselves as poor has grown, resulting in a greater sense of powerlessness.
- **Attitudinal and societal changes.** One leader felt that greater apathy on the part of the non-poor has contributed to a greater realism and self-reliance among the poor. Another leader felt that economic changes and government policies have created more barriers for impoverished Hispanics, and that poor Hispanics are more pessimistic about their chances of overcoming those barriers.
- **Violence and drugs.** Two leaders felt that poor Hispanics experience greater danger now than in the past, particularly with respect to violence and drugs. However, neither felt the problems of violence or drugs are unique to the poor.
- **Changing economy.** One leader believed that Hispanics have fewer employment opportunities because of the changing structure of the U.S. economy.
- **Poverty among children.** One leader argued that the experience of poverty has changed because an increasing proportion of the Hispanic poor are children.

Excerpts:

We have to approach poverty with an understanding of today's economy. The reality is that a worker may need to be re-trained two or three times in a lifetime. This is critical for Hispanics being left behind by the changing economy.

-- Antonia Hernandez

The trend of single parenthood is not just continuing, it's blossoming. Some single mothers do a fine job, but the odds are very tough.

-- Ruben Franco

There's a growing poverty of the spirit. It mirrors the society as a whole. But, it's the people at the bottom who are less able to deal with it.

-- Raul Yzaguirre

The burden of breaking the cycle of poverty has been put on the woman.

-- Hector Velasquez

Why has the area where I grew up gotten worse? I can't say there are no job opportunities; but the jobs available are low-paying jobs with no benefits, no opportunities to advance. And there are a lot more drugs -- sale and use. But I don't think it's because the middle class has left. I've never known the Hispanic middle class to live in the barrio.

-- Albert Jacquez

For the impoverished Puerto Rican who leaves the island and comes to the mainland, there's more isolation, more fearfulness, less stable, established communities.

-- Janice Petrovich

3

Is Persistent Poverty a Significant Issue for Hispanics?

Summary

About half these Hispanic leaders were not focused on "persistent" poverty or "the underclass". Twelve leaders either had no opinion or did not believe "persistent" poverty is a serious issue. Several of the leaders who had no opinion commented that a distinction between "poverty" and "persistent poverty" is primarily a research issue.

The three leaders most concerned with persistent poverty were Puerto Rican. All three emphasized the development of an "underclass" or a "whole class of people not moving up."

Excerpts:

A great many of the people I knew when I was young were poor; their parents were poor. I see them now: they're poor, their children are poor, their grandchildren are poor. Many kids are born without a chance in the world and they know it.

-- Ruben Franco

There is persistent poverty by design, to keep a certain class of people in a syndrome of poverty, to serve a purpose in an economic society that exploits in order to make a profit. As long as there's no major turmoil -- the fields aren't being burned, the factories aren't being seized, or businesses aren't under the gun from some federal agency -- things will continue in that vein.

-- Congressman Esteban Torres

There are three categories of the poor: the upwardly mobile poor; the "underclass," those who for whom current interventions don't seem to work; and those who fall in the middle, those who can be helped by intervention.

-- Louis Nunez

I'm a researcher and I think it is important to look at questions like "Is there persistent poverty?" But, you can continue to do that for a long time and find all sorts of little nuances. What you need to find are places where things are actually being done.

-- Janice Petrovich

The percentage of immigrants coming in is insubstantial compared to the overall Hispanic population. Poverty is a domestic problem.

-- Antonia Hernandez

4 What are the primary causes of poverty among Hispanics?

Summary:

These leaders identified a wide range of causes for poverty among Hispanics.

- **Lack of opportunities.** Five leaders felt the cause of poverty is simply "lack of opportunities," particularly educational opportunities.
- **Racism and discrimination.** Four pointed to racism and discrimination.
- **Jobs and the economy.** Three focused on economic issues: lack of jobs, loss of jobs due to changes in the U.S. economy, and overall inequities in the U.S. economic structure.
- **Combined factors.** Two leaders stressed a combination of factors: lack of resources combined with lack of leadership; and displacement from another country combined with segregation, discrimination, and the breakdown of informal and formal support systems in the U.S.
- **Poor health care.** One leader felt that poor health care is a primary cause of Hispanic poverty.

Many leaders also discussed special challenges facing Hispanic women, such as sexism and single parenhood.

Excerpts:

The problems of underprivileged students don't tend to be psychological or intellectual. Their problems are rooted in family disorganization, dysfunctional schools, and lack of role models.

-- Guarione Diaz

Basically you're born into poverty. Your parents are poor and discrimination perpetuates that poverty.

-- Raul Yzaguirre

Health problems are a major reason for poverty. If you haven't got your health, you can't work; you can't take care of your family.

-- Jane Delgado

Single mothers don't have enough schooling to get a high enough paying job to pay for child care. Welfare is one of the only ways they can somewhat feed themselves and their children.

-- Janice Petrovich

Latinas are the most vulnerable because of the sexism of our social institutions. Latinas are entering the labor force, but are not becoming economically independent and stable. There is the stereotype that Hispanics are family-oriented; I value the stereotype, but for women, I wonder how real it is. We can't lull ourselves into believing that there are no problems there.

-- Antonia Hernandez

5 *Is Hispanic poverty unique?*

Summary

Half these leaders did not consider Hispanic poverty to be "unique." Thirteen leaders had no opinion. Two felt that Hispanic poverty is not unique from poverty among other populations. The seven who did feel that Hispanic poverty has significant unique features pointed to issues such as:

- **Immigration**
- **Puerto Rican migration**
- **Legal status issues**
- **Language**
- **Culture**
- **Diversity of the Hispanic population.**

V. Interviews:
Poverty And Public Policies

1

What past strategies do you consider significant?

Summary:

Civil rights and education were the two areas in which these leaders have seen the most improvements for low-income Hispanics.

- **Civil rights.** Six leaders emphasized the significance of civil rights strategies such as affirmative action and the bilingual provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

- **Education.** Six discussed education strategies such as community-based educational empowerment efforts, Head Start, and local efforts such as the establishment of alternative high schools for Hispanic dropouts.

- **Other strategies**. Other significant strategies discussed include community and small business development, labor organizing, Hispanic community-based day care, Medicaid, and federal policies and community-based programs established under the Office of Economic Opportunity. One leader felt that the policies with the most significant impact on Hispanics are those related to immigration, and that these policies have been harmful because of the hardship they put on undocumented Hispanic workers and their families.

- **Hispanic institutions.** Leaders emphasized the role of Hispanic institutions in providing a structure for addressing Hispanic issues, even when those issues were not at the forefront of other agendas.

Excerpts:

A few years back, some of us thought Head Start was a program that was "taking our kids away" because they didn't trust or agree with how we raise children. As it has turned out, this has been a very successful program.
One of our biggest movements in the Seventies was to get open admissions policies at community colleges. It was a worthy goal, but we needed to focus more on setting standards in order for our own community to be tough and realistic about what our kids need to succeed. Access is only half the story.

-- Ruben Franco

The Bilingual Education Act was an important victory, not just because of what it did programmatically, but because of what it represented: a successful campaign led by Hispanics, for Hispanics, around a major piece of legislation.
Income-focused strategies have helped a lot of people. But income transfer programs are a one-time opportunity that only lasts as long as the program.

-- Jose Longoria

When I came to work at OEO's Migrant Division, we had the funding, the legislative authority, and the freedom to be creative, to make real changes. We helped establish community-based institutions that are still in existence today; we helped pass wage and hour reforms; we cultivated leadership. OEO provided us with fertile ground.

-- Raul Yzaguirre

My economic situation improved because I worked union. I was able to get jobs that paid better than minimum wage. Together with my peers we formed an association to protect ourselves against employer greed.

-- Jack Otero

Government subsidies in education, housing, and other areas have helped move some Hispanics into the middle class. People seem to be ashamed of remembering that.

-- Congressman Albert G. Bustamante

Some of our past community development projects have produced strong economic and political power, but not for very many people. If I had to do it over again, I'd find a way to have people working in a truly cooperative arrangement, real ownership of capital, land, and dwellings, participants in the cash flow.

While I believe in the labor movement, it has its shortcomings. Labor unions have allowed themselves to be self-serving, to only deal with their immediate constituency. To this day, with only a few exceptions, labor doesn't have relevant Hispanics in its leadership, even though we're the fastest growing part of the labor force.

-- Congressman Esteban Torres

U.S. foreign policy and IRCA (the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986) have been very bad policies for Central Americans. Central American organizations can make three primary contributions to a national Hispanic agenda: we can help them remember their roots, we can encourage them to challenge structures, and we can provide an international perspective.

-- Silvia Rosales

2

What is the highest public policy priority for ending poverty among Hispanics?

Summary:

Half the leaders felt that education is the top public policy priority. Thirteen leaders ranked education as their top priority. Of these, six felt that issues such as legal status, child care, housing, and job creation are also top priorities.

A range of other priorities were identified, including social service issues, community development, politicization, efforts to foster self-esteem, and overall redistribution of wealth and power.

Excerpts:

The first thing we have to do is to politicize the Hispanic community. Everything else is secondary. Once we have the power of the vote, then someone who is bold enough will have a base.

-- Jose Longoria

Stop putting money into research and start putting it into services.

-- Congressman Matthew Martinez

Ninety percent of poor Hispanics are willing to volunteer for employment and training programs. I could expand our program ten-fold and still have enough volunteers. If we could start helping those 90%, the hard-core 10% would be better off.

-- Hector Velasquez

National Hispanic organizations should recognize that the lack of opportunities facing recent immigrants is the same as that facing native-born Hispanics -- poor education, homelessness, overcrowding. Central Americans can contribute to a national Hispanic agenda because we are as focused on "bread and butter" issues as we are on assimilation.

-- Silvia Rosales

We need to put more resources into what we already know works.

-- Harry Pachon

Redistribution of income is the main thing we have to do, even though I don't think it will happen soon. By income distribution I don't mean social programs. I mean banking, taxation, and a whole range of strategies.

-- Congressman Esteban Torres

3 What current action do you consider promising?

Summary:

These leaders found various current strategies promising; Fourteen leaders described promising strategies, including:

- **Education.** Four leaders discussed efforts to improve Hispanics' educational opportunities, particularly efforts developed by Hispanics themselves, such as parent and student empowerment and mentoring. Overall efforts to improve education are also considered important for Hispanics, such as increased funding for Head Start.

- **Social programs.** Two leaders were encouraged that some innovative social programs have begun to focus on the range of challenges facing low-income people, rather than just supplementing income. Comprehensive case-management approaches including training and entrepreneurial opportunities were two innovations discussed. One leader felt that targeting efforts — such as proposed Job Training Partnership Act revisions — would benefit Hispanics.

- **Political and self-help organizing.** One leader was encouraged by increased attention to political organizing; another felt that self-help organizing in low-income communities holds tremendous promise.

- **Equitable taxation.** Two leaders felt that efforts to reform tax policies could substantially benefit Hispanics; current efforts to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit were cited as a promising example. These two leaders also felt that other structural reforms could be achieved, such as school finance reform and elimination of redlining (an illegal practice of denying mortgages for homes in certain minority neighborhoods).

- **Colonias legislation.** Two leaders were encouraged by national attention to the impoverished Southwestern communities known as "colonias".

- **No promising action.** Two leaders felt there is no current action that holds particular promise for Hispanics.

Excerpts:

This country is finally starting to recognize that welfare is not our primary tool for addressing poverty. Lack of access to decent jobs is the real issue.

-- Raul Yzaguirre

I'm glad to see attention being focused on children.

-- Harry Pachon

We're going to have to raise taxes to pay for education and social programs.

-- Guarione Diaz

Everyone today is talking about parent involvement. We were doing that 20 years ago. Everyone today is talking about leadership development. We've been doing that too.

-- Janice Petrovich

There will always be an underclass. The health of our nation is determined by how large that group is.

-- Jose Longoria

The biggest challenges to this nation are going to be facing a changing economy and changing infrastructure, and redirecting education. Those challenges cross all colors and all sectors.

-- Antonia Hernandez

In the national Congress you will not have a "Hispanic" bill, solely and purely for Hispanics.

-- Congressman Kika de la Garza

VI. Conclusions

This study began with the premise that Hispanics must participate in their own agenda-setting. This study suggests the need for a specific Hispanic agenda for ending poverty and it calls attention to Hispanics' capacity to lead, influence, and participate in efforts to improve the economic opportunities of their communities in the United States.

The Hispanic leaders interviewed made it clear that:

- **The issues of importance to these leaders sometimes parallel other national issues, but often with a different emphasis.** For example, improving education was a central issue for these leaders; but, as several leaders argued, improvement efforts need to recognize specific Hispanic educational needs and involve Hispanics in decision-making. These leaders were also working to improve Hispanics' economic self-sufficiency, but focused more on employment opportunities and benefits than welfare policies. They also raised issues which are of particular concern to Hispanics, such as the disproportionate impact of economic changes on Hispanics' employment opportunities; the drop in the proportion of Hispanics attending college; the dramatic level of poverty among Puerto Ricans; and the unique problems of the Hispanic elderly, of foreign-born Hispanics, and of Hispanics in U.S.-Mexico border communities.

- **These Hispanic leaders blend a range of strategies in their approach to poverty.** They did not define an "anti-poverty" strategy solely in terms of social service programs, but as a multi-dimensional strategy blending efforts in education, civil rights, political power, taxation, employment policy, and others. Perhaps in part because these leaders are focused on all Hispanics -- not just officially poor Hispanics -- they maintain comprehensive perspectives. Finally, most did not categorize the Hispanic poor into segments such as "the underclass" or "the persistently poor," but sought to identify and eliminate cross-cutting disadvantages.

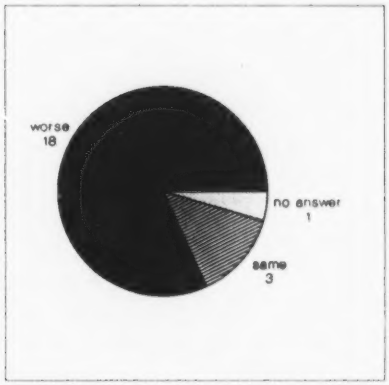
- **Many of these leaders identified the special challenges facing Hispanic women.** At the national level, however, Hispanic women remain underrepresented in the Hispanic leadership, and are often underrepresented in established women's organizations. Women's issues may come to play an increasingly large role in a Hispanic agenda for addressing poverty.

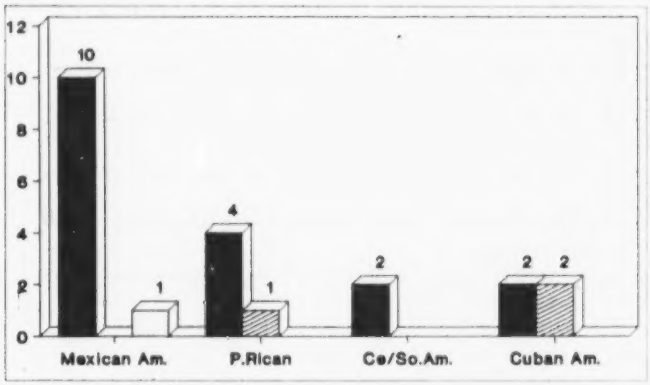
- **Hispanic institutions can serve an important role in improving the lives of low-income Hispanics.** At the local, state, and national level, Hispanics have developed unique institutions and networks. These institutions have provided a structure for addressing Hispanic issues, even when those issues were not at the forefront of other agendas.

As many of these leaders suggested, the challenge of the 1990s will not be the inclusion of Hispanics in defining problems, but the inclusion of Hispanics in defining solutions.

Appendix A: Detailed Responses

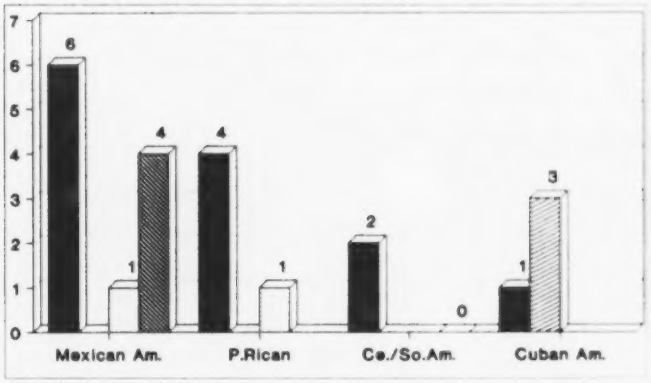
1. *Has poverty among Hispanics grown, diminished or stayed at the same level?*





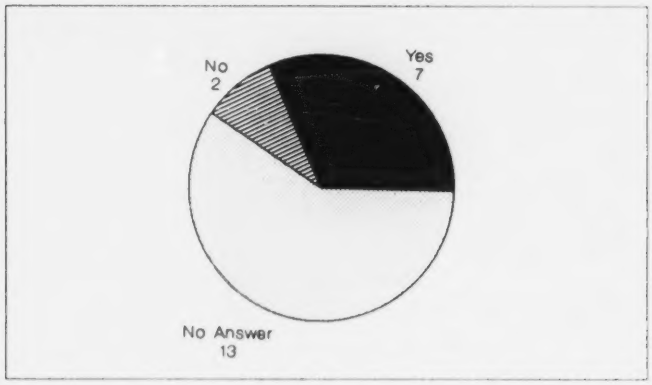
MEXICAN AMERICAN	PUERTO RICAN	CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN	CUBAN
(11)	(5)	(2)	(4)
Grown = 10 evidence: • poverty among elderly • not kept pace with other populations • more poor overall, including Hispanics • greater disparity between rich and poor (2) • poverty among immigrants • poverty in colonias • wages have not kept pace with inflation • no specific evidence (2)	**Grown = 4** evidence: • Puerto Rican crisis • some are trapped in poverty -- issue sometimes clouded by influx of newcomers • Reagan budget cuts; homelessness • Puerto Ricans objectively at bottom and growing self-perception of being at bottom	**Grown = 2** evidence: • particularly situation of undocumented • poverty among children	**Grown = 2** evidence: • proportion of Hispanics in college has leveled off
Same = 0	**Same = 1**	**Same = 0**	**Same = 2**
No Answer = 1	**No Answer = 0**	**No Answer = 0**	**No Answer = 0**

2 • *Has the nature of poverty among Hispanics changed?*



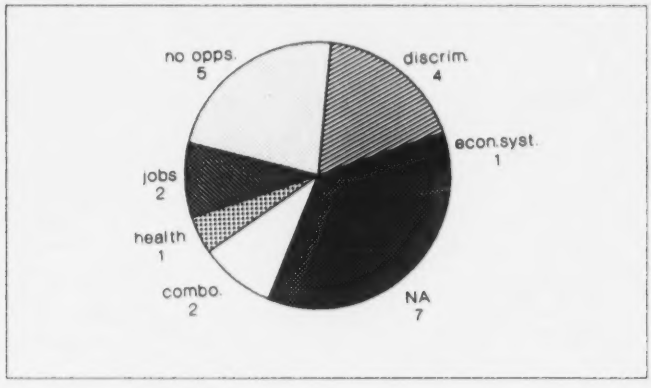
MEXICAN AMERICAN	PUERTO RICAN	CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN	CUBAN
(11)	(5)	(2)	(4)
Yes = 6 evidence: • growing self-perception as poor (2) • apathy of non-poor; less government support; greater realism and self-reliance of poor • violence, drugs, gangs (2) -- specified that these were not unique to the poor, reflect changes in society overall • difficulties presented by changing economy	**Yes = 4** evidence: • collapse/increased segregation of public schools • growing self-perception as poor • escape was easier in past; despair at not seeing progress • cut-backs in social programs	**Yes = 2** evidence: • lack of documentation a larger barrier to economic security • increasingly an experience of children	**Yes = 1** evidence: • growing self-perception as poor **Don't Know = 0**
Don't Know = 1 **No Answer = 4**	**Don't Know = 1** **No Answer = 0**	**Don't Know = 0** **No Answer = 0**	**No Answer = 0** **No = 3**

3 • *Is Hispanic poverty unique?*



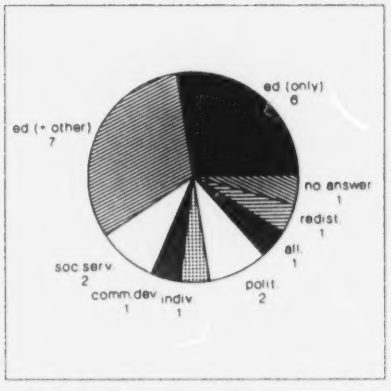
MEXICAN AMERICAN	PUERTO RICAN	CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN	CUBAN
(11)	(5)	(2)	(4)
Yes = 2 reason: • immigration • culture	**Yes = 2** reason: • language • migration	**Yes = 1** reason: • citizenship status issues	**Yes = 2** reason: • immigration • diversity of population
No = 1 **No Answer = 8**	**No = 1** **No Answer = 2**	**No = 0** **No Answer = 1**	**No = 0** **No Answer = 2**

4 • *What are the primary causes of poverty among Hispanics?*



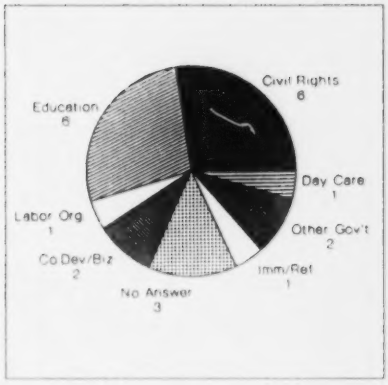
MEXICAN AMERICAN	PUERTO RICAN	CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN	CUBAN
(11)	(5)	(2)	(4)
Answer = 8 cause: • lack of education opportunities; lack of unity • racism (2) • poverty among parents perpetuated by discrimination • lack of opportunities • lack of educational opportunities; lack of affordable day care • lack of resources; lack of leadership • lack of jobs	**Answer = 3** cause: • lack of education opportunities • increasing cost of living; loss of jobs • lack of opportunities; lack of support systems for newcomers	**Answer = 1** cause: • economic system	**Answer = 3** cause: • displacement from another country; segregation/ discrimination; breakdown in support systems • poor health/health care • discrimination/education
No Answer = 3	**No Answer = 2**	**No Answer = 1**	**No Answer = 1**

5 • *What is the highest public policy priority for ending poverty among Hispanics?*



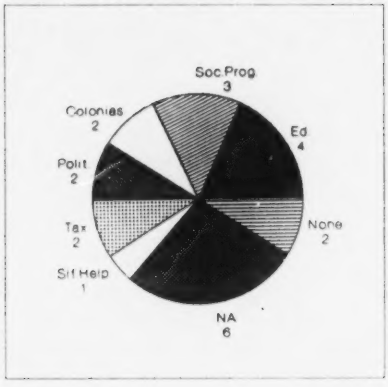
MEXICAN AMERICAN	PUERTO RICAN	CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN	CUBAN
(11)	(5)	(2)	(4)
Education = 6 . education and job creation . education (3) . education and day care . education and strategies not focused on welfare **Redistribution of Wealth = 1** . tax reform, elimination of redlining, etc. **Community Development = 1** . aid to *colonias* **Politicization = 1** **Everything = 1** **No Answer = 1**	**Education = 4** • education (2) • education, housing, employment and training, family learning centers • education, housing, government spending for jobs **Self-esteem, job creation = 1**	**Education = 1** • education, particularly young children **Education and Legalization = 1** • amnesty and support services, education	**Education = 1** **Social Services = 2** • re-designing social programs to fit Hispanic needs, raising taxes, non-government strategies • quality, affordable health care = 1 **Increasing political representation = 1**

1 • *What past action do you consider significant?*



MEXICAN AMERICAN	PUERTO RICAN	CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN	CUBAN
(11)	(5)	(2)	(4)
Civil Rights = 1 • voting rights act	**Civil Rights = 1** • affirmative action	**Immigration/Refugee Issues = 1**	**Civil Rights (and other) = 1** • civil rights, voting rights, minimum wage, Job Corps, federal aid to education
Civil Rights/Education = 2 • civil rights, GI bill • voting rights act, bilingual education act	**Civil Rights/Education = 1** • civil rights, head start	**Education = 1** • Head Start	**Day Care = 1** • establishing local day care centers
Education = 2 • Head Start (1) • English Proficiency Act	**Education = 2** • ASPIRA (2)		**Medicaid = 1**
Labor Organizing = 1	**Community Development = 1**		**Education/Gov't Programs = 1** • establishing alternative high school for drop outs; gov't social programs have not been designed for Hispanics
Office Economic Opportunity Programs = 1			
Small Business Legislation = 1			
No Answer = 3		**Don't Know = 0**	
Don't Know = 1		**No Answer = 0**	

2 • *What current action do you consider promising?*



MEXICAN AMERICAN	PUERTO RICAN	CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN	CUBAN
(11)	(5)	(2)	(4)
Education = 2 • Hispanics' increasing focus on education • increasing attention to education, day care; development of mentoring programs **Social Programs = 1** • shifting away from income supplements **Aid to Colonias = 2** **Politicization = 1** **Tax Reform = 2** • tax reform, *Edgewood* decision, changes in JTPA • tax reform, elimination of redlining practices, small business development **No Answer = 3**	**Education = 1** • ASPIRA **Social Programs = 1** • development of comprehensive, case management services **None = 2** **No Answer = 1**	**Self-Help Organizing = 1** **Education = 1** • increased funding for Head Start **No Answer = 0**	**Social Programs = 1** • targeting the most disadvantaged, developing entreprenurial activities **Politicization = 1** **No Answer = 2**

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Hispanic Leaders: Interview Guide

(Approximate interview time: 90 minutes)

I. Perspective

1. When you think of poverty, what do you think of?

2. How would you describe what you mean by "poverty"?

3. What experiences or information have had the greatest impact on how you think about poverty?

4. What poverty issues are you currently working on?

5. Where do you turn for facts and opinions shape your views regarding poverty?

II. Observations

1. Has poverty among Hispanics grown, diminished, or stayed at the same level?

2. There has been a recent focus on what are called the "persistently poor," those who stay poor for long periods of time. Are there "persistently poor" Hispanics? Is persistent poverty a significant issue for Hispanics?

3. Are poor Hispanic communities significantly different to live in than they were in the past. If so, how?

4. What trends do you see in poor Hispanic communities? Are these different from trends occurring in non-poor communities?

5. Is Hispanic poverty unique from that of other poor groups?

III. Analysis

1. What are the primary causes of poverty among Hispanics?

2. Sociologist William Julius Wilson has observed a growing gap between middle class and poor Blacks, with middle class Blacks having left the ghettos and the subsequent concentration of poverty increasing. Does this description apply to Hispanics?

3. What past strategy do you consider most significant in the fight against Hispanic poverty?

IV. Directions

1. What is the highest priority for addressing poverty among Hispanics?

2. What current action do you consider promising?

3. Who do you consider the most effective Hispanic leaders with regard to poverty issues? Why do you consider them effective?

4. What current action do you consider promising?

V. Conclusions

1. If you could look into the United States in the future, what would you like to see?

2. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to add?

Appendix C: For Further Reading

The following is a partial listing of recent work focused on Hispanic political leadership.

Bonilla-Santiago, Gloria. *Breaking Ground and Barriers: Hispanic Women Developing Effective Leadership.* Greenwood-Praeger Press, forthcoming.

Carranza, Ruth. "Leaders Reply: In What Ways are Hispanic Women Better Off/Worse Off Today than Ten Years Ago." *Intercambios Femeniles, 3,* (Spring 1988): 10.

de la Garza, Rodolfo. *Public Policy Priorities of Chicano Political Elites.* (U.S.- Mexico Project Series, No. 7) Washington, D.C.: Overseas Development Council, July 1982.

Falcon, Angelo. *Puerto Ricans and the 1989 Mayoral Election in New York City.* New York City: Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, March 1989.

Gutierrez, Jose Angel. "'Societal Pie' Sliced Wider for Hispanics." *The Progressive,* November 1990.

"Hall of Fame." *Hispanic, The Magazine for Hispanics,* October 1989.

Moncada, Alberto and Olivas, Juan. *Los hispanos en la politica norteamericana.* Madrid, Spain: Instituto de Cooperacion Iberoamericana, 1990.

Nicolau, Siobhan O. and Santiestevan, Henry. *From the Eye of the Storm.* New York City: Hispanic Policy Development Project, September 1990.

Pachon, Harry. "An Overview of Hispanic Elected Officials," *1984 National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials.* Washington, D.C.: NALEO Education Fund, 1984.

Welch, Susan and Hibbing, John. R. "Hispanic Representation in the U.S. Congress," *Latinos and the Political System.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.